Saskatchewan Council
on Disability Issues

# Saskatchewan's Disability Action Plan

June 2001

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Honourable Harry Van Mulligen
Minister Responsible for Disability Issues

Dear Minister Van Mulligen:

It is with a great deal of pride and satisfaction that I present to you, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues, a Saskatchewan Disability Action Plan. This action plan begins to fulfill one of the mandates of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues – to provide input into the development of a government-wide Disability Action Plan. This plan reflects council discussion and consultation with the disability community.

It came as no surprise to council that individuals with disabilities want to live in the community as full and equal members of our society. It came as no surprise that individuals with disabilities wish to attend schools in their neighbourhood, access educational and training opportunities, participate in the social, cultural, recreational and spiritual life of the community, and achieve economic independence through meaningful work. In other words, individuals with disabilities wish to be fully participating members of society and to be included in all aspects of community life. It also came as no surprise to members of Council that individuals with disabilities are experiencing a broad range of barriers to their full participation in our community.

The action plan speaks to the realization of full citizenship and inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Two elements, self-determination and disability supports are crucial to the realization of this vision.

Our society has traditionally viewed and treated individuals with disabilities as childlike, asexual, unable to make decisions for themselves, and consequently unable to participate in mainstream community activities. Self-determination, on the other hand, upholds the right of the individual with a disability to create and make choices, to take risks and to participate in decisions that affect the well being of their community. The concept of self-determination recognizes that individuals with disabilities, their families and support networks are uniquely positioned to determine needs and how they are best met.

Disability supports span the spectrum of services. Disability supports are interrelated and are not stand-alone programs and services. For example, many individuals with disabilities are unable to access employment and training opportunities without the availability of special needs transportation. Accessible housing has little meaning without access to personal care services. These supports are the means by which individuals with disabilities participate as citizens in their communities. From the perspective of council, the Disability Action Plan is really about providing disability supports to ensure full citizenship for individuals with disabilities.

The role of government is to facilitate the process through which individuals with disabilities achieve and maintain full citizenship. This may mean that extra efforts and accommodations are required to achieve equal opportunities and equity of outcomes for people with disabilities.

The council looks forward to the response of the provincial government to the Disability Action Plan. We are confident the government will share our vision of inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the mainstream of society. Our council, individuals with disabilities, their families and support networks look forward to the opportunity to work closely with government in implementing the Disability Action Plan.

I wish to thank the many individuals, community groups and organizations and government officials who assisted in the preparation of this document. The commitment and dedication of the members of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues to our task was commendable. A special acknowledgement is for the untiring support and assistance of the Office of Disability Issues staff.

Michael Huck, Chair
Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues

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# Executive Summary

Individuals with disabilities aspire to take their place as fully contributing citizens in our province. Many are frustrated because they are treated as dependent persons with little ability to control their lives. They wish to have the same opportunities as other Canadians and to be able to face their challenges as citizens with the same degree of self-determination as those without disabilities.

In January 1998, after consultation with the disability community and government departments, the Government of Saskatchewan announced the creation of a disability strategy. One element of the strategy was the establishment of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues. Reporting to the Minister Responsible for Disability Issues, the council's mandate is to provide advice on issues affecting individuals with disabilities, to obtain direct input from individuals with disabilities on issues related to government programs, policies and priorities and to assist in the development of a government-wide Disability Action Plan.

This document contains the council's proposed Disability Action Plan. It was developed from a review of documents, council discussions and consultations with individuals with disabilities, their families and support networks. Direct input was obtained through a series of community forums held in the spring of 2000.

This action plan reflects a paradigm shift in the way society responds to individuals with disabilities. Instead of focusing on deficits, the document focuses on strengths. The desire of all individuals with disabilities to have dignity, to be seen as individuals, to be listened to, and to have choices about how and where their needs are met are validated in this document.

The basis for the action plan is a vision of full citizenship for all individuals including those who have disabilities. This vision of citizenship emphasizes the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in our province. Fulfillment of this vision requires the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all segments of the social, economic and political life of our province.

The vision and citizenship statements form the core of the action plan:

> **Vision** — a society that recognizes the needs and aspirations of all citizens, respects the rights of individuals to self-determination, and provides the resources and supports necessary for full citizenship.
>
> **Citizenship Statement** — individuals with disabilities are citizens in the full sense of the term. They have the same *rights and responsibilities* as other citizens to be included and to participate fully in society.

Awareness and understanding, safety and security, disability supports, health, education, employment, and income supports are the elements needed to achieve this vision.

The Disability Action Plan represents a process through which our vision of full citizenship can be achieved. The first steps in this action plan are the beginning of this process. They represent measures that council members believe are the most critical to removing barriers to full citizenship and actions that can be attainable in the near future. Some of the suggested actions will require a change in attitudes. Other suggested steps will require increased resources.

Individuals with disabilities are an untapped resource in our society. Given appropriate supports and services they can contribute to the economic, cultural and social framework of our society. This document is about finding the will to provide those resources.

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# Introduction

Individuals with disabilities aspire to take their rightful place as fully contributing citizens in our province. Many are frustrated because they are treated as dependent persons with little ability to control their lives. They wish to have the same opportunities as others in Saskatchewan and to be able to face their challenges as citizens with the same degree of self-determination as those without disabilities.

Historically, individuals with disabilities have been marginalized. They are economically and socially disadvantaged compared to the general population and have not had the opportunity to share significantly in the responsibility of developing policies and programs that affect their lives.

The Government of Saskatchewan has recognized the need to address these issues. After consultation with the disability community, the government announced the creation of a provincial disability strategy in January 1998. The purpose of the provincial disability strategy is the improvement of the quality of life and enhancement of opportunities for individuals with disabilities. A main focus of the initiative is the creation of the Office of Disability Issues and the formation of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues. The Council has as its central mandate the development of a Disability Action Plan.

This report contains the council's proposed Disability Action Plan. It was developed from a review of documents on disability issues[1], discussion within the council and consultations with individuals with disabilities, their families and their support networks. Direct input was obtained through a series of community forums held in the spring of 2000.

The document is divided into four sections. The first section, **Background**, describes the composition of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues and its mandate. This section also describes the process the Council adopted to create its Disability Action Plan and provides a summary of the themes and specific issues that emerged from the consultations. The second section, **An Inclusive View of Citizenship**, contains the Vision Statement and

the statement of Citizenship adopted by the council as well as the values and guiding principles that arise from the vision and citizenship statements. These statements provide the foundation for the third section, **The Path Forward and First Steps**. This section identifies some first steps towards inclusive citizenship. These steps are organized in seven categories: awareness and understanding, safety and security, disability supports, health, education, employment, and income support. The issues discussed and the proposed actions are interrelated and should not be considered in isolation, but as part of an integrated approach to disability issues.

The final section, **Future Role of the Council** deals with the role of the council and suggestions for action.

The actions identified in the First Steps represent the beginning of a process. The council is aware that there are areas that have not been fully addressed in this document. One such area concerns issues facing Aboriginal persons with disabilities. Some important work has recently been completed on this issue, notably the *Urban Aboriginal Persons with Disabilities: Triple Jeopardy!* research project. The council encourages the government to give serious consideration to the recommendations in the *Triple Jeopardy* report. Issues facing Aboriginal people with disabilities will be an area of further work by the council.

Another issue brought to the attention of the council was the need for a process to bring complaints and concerns to government regarding the disability service system. One option that was presented to the council was the establishment of a Disabilities Advocate. The council believes that more discussion is needed regarding the different options to address this issue. The council has included further work on a complaints process as area of action in Part 4 - Future Role of the Council.

The Disability Action Plan reflects a paradigm shift in the way society responds to individuals with disabilities. Instead of focusing on deficits, the document focuses on strengths. This action plan speaks to the desire of all individuals with disabilities to be treated with respect, to be seen as individuals, to be heard, and to have choices about how and where their needs are met.

# I. Background

The impetus for a disability strategy for the Government of Saskatchewan came from individuals with disabilities and community groups who felt that they had little influence on the development and implementation of policy and programs affecting them. Community representatives expressed a desire for a genuinely collaborative approach to addressing disability issues. They recognized that there is no easy, or one time "fix" for disability issues, but that an on-going process was needed to move the agenda of fairness and inclusion forward.

In January 1998, after consultation with the disability community and government departments, the Government of Saskatchewan announced the creation of a disability strategy. The centrepiece of the strategy is the creation of a provincial Disability Action Plan to be developed in collaboration with the disability community.

In addition to the Disability Action Plan, the government directed the creation of the following structures and processes to address disability issues within government:

- an Office of Disability Issues;
- an interdepartmental Officials Steering Committee on Disability Issues;
- a disability inclusion lens to assess the impact of policies, programs and legislation on individuals with disabilities (please see p. 25);
- a community-based Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues whose purpose is to advise the Minister responsible for Disabilities Issues and provide leadership in the development of the Disability Action Plan; and
- joint community and government task teams to address issues related to disability.

With the announcement of this strategy, the government signalled its commitment to address disability issues in an inclusive manner and from a long-term perspective. The cornerstone of the strategy involves the participation of individuals with disabilities and their representatives in developing policies and programs that affect them.

## Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues

The members of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues were appointed by the Honourable Harry Van Mulligen, Minister Responsible for Disability Issues in March 1999. The fifteen council members were chosen from nominations made to the Minister by the disability community and were appointed for either a two or a three-year term. All members of the council serve as volunteers, and receive no remuneration other than expenses. Many have full-time jobs as well as their community involvement. The council membership includes individuals with disabilities, parents, and service providers who are active volunteers in the community. While 15 people cannot represent every disability, council members are personally familiar with, and have experienced first hand, a wide range of disabilities. In many instances, the same individual has had experience with more than one area of disability. Through participation in the council meetings, members have increased their understanding of disability issues. Collectively, council members bring to their deliberations a wide range of personal experience and understanding as well as a commitment to the betterment of opportunities for all individuals with disabilities. Appendix A contains a brief biographical sketch of the members of the council.

The council was appointed to provide advice on issues affecting individuals with disabilities, to obtain direct input from individuals with disabilities on issues related to government programs, policies and priorities and to assist in the development of a government-wide Disability Action Plan. The development of the action plan has been the primary focus of the council's activity over the past two years. Council members have found the task to be large and complex, one that requires considerable thought, discussion, time and energy. The council members are committed to development of a Disability Action Plan that is thorough, represents the aspirations of persons with a disability, identifies actions to be taken immediately as a matter of priority, and helps illuminate the path into the future.

## Community Forums 2000

The council members identified and prioritized the issues as they saw them in the form of a workbook entitled *Making the Vision a Reality: A Workbook for Saskatchewan's Disability Action Plan.* This document contained two parts. The first part centred on a vision statement based on a concept of citizenship that incorporated inclusion and equality as fundamental principles (please see Part II, p.15). It contained the values and goals for the proposed Disability Action Plan. Part Two listed the priorities identified by the council, outcomes, current initiatives and ideas for future action.

The priorities were presented separately under four broad categories or "building blocks": Citizenship, Disability Supports, Education and Employment, and Income. The building blocks were based on those in the document *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues.*

To determine if the proposed action plan reflected the priorities of the disability community in Saskatchewan, arrangements were made for extensive consultations. Approximately 1,200 copies of the workbook were distributed throughout the province. Written and telephone responses were encouraged. Both a fax number and an e-mail address were available for those wishing to use them. Active participation was encouraged through a series of open-ended questions.

In May and June 2000, twenty-four community forums were held in eleven communities (Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Yorkton, North Battleford, Estevan, Wilkie, Swift Current, Melfort, Moose Jaw, and La Ronge). Notice of the forums was publicized throughout the disability community and information was given to the media. Children and youth were encouraged to participate.

## Themes from the Community Forums

The participants at the community forums expressed their support for the proposed plan. They did, however, suggest that the vision, values and goals statements needed to be strengthened. Their comments led to a significant revision of these statements.

Participants recognized that there is no simple fix for the difficulties they experience. On the other hand they did convey a sense of urgency and frustration. The problems they are experiencing are pressing.

The general themes that emerged from the responses are identified below. These themes appeared in all areas of the province, whether rural, urban or northern.

- **Accessing Services**. Frustration was expressed by all sectors of the disability community at difficulties encountered in accessing relevant programs and services.

- **Control and Choice of Services**. All sectors of the disability community expressed a desire to have more control and choice over the services provided to them. Individuals with disabilities and their families want to be an integral part of the planning process as an appropriate set of services are put in place for them.

- **Improvement in Opportunities**. Some participants noted that some things were being done 'right', that opportunities for some individuals with disabilities had been enhanced but that there was still a long way to go before the lives of all individuals with disabilities were improved. Other participants noted that some programs were a move in the right direction, but needed "fine tuning". Some services are effective but limited in scope and resources.

- **Marginalization**. Many individuals with disabilities are not able to participate effectively in their communities and do not control their own lives.

- **Societal Attitudes**. Participants noted the limited awareness and the misunderstanding that the public often expresses regarding disability. They also noted that many persons view disability as a deficit of the individual and, therefore, primarily an individual responsibility and not a responsibility shared with society as a whole.

- **Informed Choices**. Individuals with disabilities consider it extremely important that they be fully informed of all options available to them so that they can make informed choices with respect to services such as home care, education, medical treatment and disability supports.

- **Integration of Services**. Some individuals with disabilities require services from more than one agency. Many respondents mentioned the difficulty of working with different agencies in trying to address an issue and of the difficulty in co-ordinating services.

- **Invisible Disabilities**. Disabilities such as mental health disabilities, learning disabilities, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and acquired brain injury are not readily observable and are often misunderstood by the public. The public must become more aware of, and more accepting of, individuals with such disabilities. Programs and services to improve the lives of persons with invisible disabilities need to be strengthened and enhanced.

- **Life-long Learning**. Mainstream society is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of appropriate learning opportunities throughout the life span. These opportunities may relate directly or indirectly to expanding employment opportunities, or to activities to enhance quality of life. Such opportunities are crucial for individuals with disabilities.

- **Transitions**. Moving from one stage in life to another, whether it be from kindergarten to grade one, labour market entry, or age related changes (e.g. child to teenager) can pose difficulties and uncertainties for many people. These periods of transition can be especially difficult for individuals with disabilities.

## Specific Issues

Participants also identified a number of specific issues or problems that require attention. These include:

- **Transportation**. Transportation was identified as an essential support for involvement in education programs and employment, accessing health services and participating in the community.

- **Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living (SAIL)**. Considerable concern was expressed with respect to the SAIL program. Participants felt it needed to be more flexible and responsive to individual needs.

- **Home Care**. Participants indicated that home care services were not sufficiently flexible to meet their needs. Most supported more control over and choice of services.

- **Supports to Families**. Many families expressed extreme frustration at not having adequate supports to help them care for their loved ones at home. Examples of supports that would assist families are family managed respite care, home care, early intervention services, and help to cover the additional costs of a disability.

- **Housing**. Participants expressed concern with the lack of supportive living situations sensitive to individual needs, including persons with invisible disabilities (for example, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, learning disabilities and mental health disabilities).

- **Aboriginal People with Disabilities**. The responses from the First Nations communities in the La Ronge area served to highlight the enormous problems faced by individuals with disabilities in Aboriginal communities. The problems bear some similarity to those experienced by individuals with disabilities in other communities but are aggravated by isolation and issues related to jurisdiction and the acceptance of disability in the community. The development of effective policies and supports for Aboriginal persons with disabilities is a difficult and complex challenge.

- **Income Support**. Two common issues raised at the forums were inadequacy of social assistance benefits and the disincentives to employment inherent in the welfare system. Participants noted the challenges of living on income support while trying cover the additional costs of disability. Some participants noted that they wanted to work but they rely on the benefits and supports provided through social assistance and are uncertain as to whether they can cover the costs of these supports through their employment.

- **Employment**. Employment issues were mentioned at every consultation. The concerns ranged from difficulty getting jobs despite appropriate qualifications, to lack of accommodations/ support, to income issues as mentioned above.

- **Education**. There is a need for lifelong educational opportunities that are appropriate, flexible and affordable. There are few opportunities to participate in programs that could increase the quality of life of individuals with disabilities. There is a need for educational opportunities for young people and adults that are independent of job training.

Based on our discussion of the issues and the review of the participants' responses, we came to the understanding that citizenship is the pivotal point about which the Disability Action Plan must revolve. The next section describes our vision and presents an inclusive statement of citizenship as well as the values and guiding principles for the proposed actions.

# II. An Inclusive Vision of Citizenship

**Vision**

A society that recognizes the needs and aspirations of all citizens, respects the rights of individuals to self-determination, and provides the resources and supports necessary for full citizenship.

— *Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues*

**Citizenship Statement**

Individuals with disabilities are citizens in the full sense of the term. They have the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens to be included and to participate fully in society.

— *Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues*

## Full Citizenship — The Foundation and the Goal of the Disability Action Plan

The Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues is committed to a vision of full citizenship for all individuals including those who have disabilities. Fulfilment of this vision requires the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all segments of the social, economic and political life of our province. Crucial to this vision are the concepts of inclusion and self-determination. Systems, programs, policies and attitudes will need to change if they are to reflect this vision.

Our vision of citizenship emphasizes the full and equal participation of individuals with disabilities in our province. This may mean that "special efforts and accommodations are required in order to equalize opportunities and ensure equity of outcomes for people with disabilities."[2]

The vision and citizenship statements are the heart of the action plan framework. They will function as a prism through which we evaluate current programs and practises. They guide our actions.

### *In Unison*

Understanding disability issues from the perspective of citizenship is an evolving process. This perspective has been adopted by federal/provincial/territorial governments and expressed in the document *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues.*

*In Unison* provides a blueprint for the integration of individuals with disabilities to Canadian society. It articulates a vision of persons with disabilities as full participants in all aspects of Canadian life. *In Unison* seeks to expand the boundaries of mainstream services and promote access to generic programs and services for all Canadians, including individuals with disabilities.

*In Unison* outlines a set of values and principles to guide reform. It also identifies four key building blocks essential to the achievement of full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the social, political and economic life of our society. These four building blocks, Citizenship, Income, Employment and Disability Supports, formed the basis of the working document and are incorporated into the council's proposed direction for Saskatchewan's Disability Action Plan.

### *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and Persons with Disabilities

In Canada, the shift to a citizenship model was strengthened with the creation of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982. While earlier human rights legislation had already established

the principles of equal rights and access, the equality provisions of section 15 of the *Charter* entrenched these principles in the Constitution. Section 15(1) states:

> Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Subsequent decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada have created a body of precedent and common law principles that have expanded and clarified the notions of inclusion and accommodation.

Three recent Supreme Court decisions, *Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education, 1997, Eldridge v. British Columbia, 1997* and *Granovsky v. Canada, 2000* provide significant clarification of the collective responsibility that all Canadians have to include individuals with disabilities in the mainstream of society. In *Eaton*, the court established that full integration or inclusion is the starting point for determining whether or not an individual's right to equality is being impinged. The court noted:

> Exclusion from the mainstream of society results from the construction of a society based solely on "mainstream" attributes to which disabled persons will never be able to gain access. Whether it is the impossibility of success at a written test for a blind person, or the need for ramp access to a library, the discrimination does not lie in the attribution of untrue characteristics to the disabled individual. The blind person cannot see and the person in a wheelchair needs a ramp. Rather, it is the failure to make reasonable accommodation, to fine-tune society so that its structures and assumptions do not result in the relegation and banishment of disabled persons from participation, which results in discrimination against them.

In *Eldridge*[3] three deaf individuals claimed their rights had been breached when a local hospital refused to provide a sign language interpretation service. The court ruled in their favour and established that the standard of reasonable accommodation rises with the significance of the service or function being provided.

Access to public health services requires a very high standard because of the fundamental effect these services have on the lives of all citizens.

In *Granovsky*, the court further clarified that the focus of section 15(1) of the *Charter* addresses the response of the state to the disability, and not the impairment itself. The court noted:

> The *Charter* is not a magic wand that can eliminate physical or mental impairments, nor is it expected to create the illusion of doing so. Nor can it alleviate or eliminate the functional limitations truly created by the impairment. What s.15 of the *Charter* can do, and it is a role of immense importance, is address the way in which the state responds to people with disabilities. Section 15(1) ensures that governments may not, intentionally or through failure of appropriate accommodation, stigmatize the underlying physical or mental impairment, or attribute functional limitations to the individual that underlying physical or mental impairment does not entail, or fail to recognize the added burdens which individuals with disabilities may encounter in achieving self-fulfilment in a world relentlessly orientated to the able-bodied.

The principles articulated in these three decisions provide support and guidance for the revision of existing social policy as well as providing direction for the development of new policy models that address inclusion, integration and accommodation of all citizens.

## Self-Determination

Embedded in the council's vision statement is the concept of self-determination. This concept involves a shift from the assumption that individuals with disabilities are dependent, unable to make decisions for themselves, unable to take risks, and unable to participate in mainstream community activities to considering them as more independent than dependent, as having the right to create and make choices, to take risks and to participate in decisions that affect the well being of their community.

The inclusion of this concept in the Disability Action Plan sparked considerable debate within the council. The concern was for those individuals with disabilities who are unable to make good decisions

for themselves. For example, a person with a mental health disability may not be able to plan for his or her own welfare and treatment because of the illness itself. However, all agreed that the concept of self-determination embodies the issue of human dignity and respect and for this reason the council members believe it should have a prominent place in the document.

Self-determination is an elusive term, one that has different meanings for different people and different meanings in different situations. In this document we use the term in both a remedial and a fundamental sense. For many individuals with disabilities self-determination is important from a remedial perspective because it addresses oppressive situations. The most obvious examples are found in the historical treatment of individuals with disabilities with respect to disability supports, housing, home care and transportation.

The concept is also used in its fundamental sense. In this sense self-determination refers to the entitlement of all citizens to be treated with understanding, respect and dignity. We believe that individuals with disabilities should have the same opportunities to plan for their own needs and to participate in their communities, as do their non-disabled peers. Programs, resources and supports should be designed to ensure independence and participation.

## Self-determination within the Context of Interdependence

The loss of respect and dignity that many individuals with disabilities have experienced in accessing needed services makes self-determination a key issue for the future. However, we recognize that all members of society, whether disabled or not, are limited in their ability to fully control their lives. John Packer, Legal Advisor to the European High Commissioner on National Minorities, observed:

> Very few of us, individually or in communities, have actually the power to determine ourselves. Human beings are social animals; we live in community and we are subject to many limitations on what we have as a possibility to determine unilaterally.[4]

Self-determination is achieved within a context of interdependence. Each of us must deal with constraints imposed by our individual abilities and the services that a society can reasonably be expected to provide. Dealing with such constraints is difficult, but the difficulty can be faced more easily in a supportive community. As the parent of a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome said "We need to recognize the importance of the family and support networks in the successes of a person with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect – no one operates in a vacuum."

There are times when individuals need support in making decisions. This support could be through family, friends, mentors, and professionals. At times that assistance may take the form of legislative protection. *The Adult Guardianship and Co-decision Making Act* is an example of this type of legislation. However, it is our expectation that the individual will be involved in the decision making process to the full extent of his or her abilities. The challenge will be to ensure that decisions are not taken out of the hands of the individual unnecessarily.

## The Inclusion of Individuals with Disabilities in Saskatchewan

Inclusion permeates all aspects of the Disability Action Plan and is crucial to its success. It is also the most elusive goal. As a respondent to the community forums said "[You] need to change not just the infrastructures – you need to change people's thinking."

## Resources and Supports

Critical to achieving this vision of full citizenship for individuals with disabilities is the enhancement and transformation of resources and supports provided to individuals with disabilities. Many will likely require some type of support through out their life. These supports and resources need to be flexible and responsive to changing needs and situations. The **First Steps** in the action plan identify a starting point for achieving flexible and responsive resources and supports.

## Values and Guiding Principles

The values and guiding principles evolved from the vision and the citizenship statement.

## Values

The values express common beliefs we share as a community. They apply to all members of society.

All of us:

- are self–determining individuals who have the right to direct our own lives.
- have inherent worth, dignity and respect.
- have rights and responsibilities to participate in the social, economic, and cultural life of society.
- are entitled to accommodation in achieving equal access to public and private services.
- are members of an interdependent community that reflects a rich diversity including culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation and age.
- are entitled to be safe and secure and to live our lives free from violence and victimization.

## Guiding Principles

The guiding principles serve as the bridge that makes attainment of our vision for individuals with disabilities a reality. They guide and inform our actions.

Ensure:

- a legislative and policy framework that entitles every individual with a disability access to public and private services with supports as needed.

- programs and services for individuals with disabilities are timely, sensitive and responsive to individual need and address the additional costs of disability.

- the active and full participation of individuals with disabilities, their families and support networks in the review, development and implementation of programs, policies and legislation that affects them.

- programs and services are seamless and integrated through the life-span and through changes in disability.

- disability issues are addressed through mainstream services and programs complemented by specialized programs or services.

# III. Path Forward and First Steps

The Disability Action Plan is based on the principle of full citizenship for all individuals including those who have disabilities. This principle supports a vision of a society that recognizes the needs and aspirations of all citizens, respects the right of individuals to self-determination, and provides the resources and supports necessary for full citizenship. Seven elements are needed to achieve this vision:

- Awareness and Understanding
- Safety and Security
- Disability Supports
- Health
- Education
- Employment
- Income Support

While the Disability Action Plan is organized into seven components, these components are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the need for integration of services was one of the major themes of the community forums. Each of the first steps in the action plan must be viewed in conjunction with each other. For example, the proposals under education do not impact education alone. Health, income and disability supports all may be part of the services needed by a particular individual in order for him or her to access an educational program. Thus, a particular action can have implications for more than one government department.

The discussion of each of the action plan elements will have the following format:

- **What We Heard** — provides responses from the community forums and quotes from documents used in the writing of the Disability Action Plan
- **Issues** — provides a brief discussion of concerns raised at the forums and in council discussions.
- **Path Forward** — identifies directions necessary for our vision to become a reality.
- **First Steps** — identifies actions to move us toward the vision of full citizenship for individuals with disabilities.

# A - Awareness and Understanding

## What We Heard

*There is a lot of education that needs to be done... – with communities and government.*

— Community Forum 2000

*Disability is often seen as a personal or individual problem and not something that society as a whole needs to deal with.*

— Community Forum 2000

*[We] need more education... around hidden disabilities.*

— Community Forum 2000

## Issues

Our vision statement expresses a vision of a society that is aware of and supportive of the needs of individuals with disabilities, a vision of a society where all citizens achieve full citizenship. However, the reality, as expressed by the participants at the forums, was of a society that has limited awareness and understanding of disability issues. If the goal of full citizenship is to be attained changes in attitudes, perceptions, programs and systems at all levels of society are needed. Creating change is not an easy task. Both the disability community and the public will need to work together to make this vision a reality.

Perceptions and attitudes perpetuate the stereotyping, and exclusion of individuals with disabilities from mainstream society. Change in this area is slow. The challenge is to help people change their thinking from one of non-acceptance to one of inclusion.

A current initiative under development that addresses the awareness and understanding of disability issues within government is the Disability Inclusion Lens. The purpose of the lens is to assess the impact of policies, programs and legislation on individuals with disabilities. The lens is being developed by a joint community and government working group under the leadership of the Office of Disability Issues. Consistent use of the lens will help to ensure that

the needs of individuals with disabilities will be considered and incorporated into the initial planning and ongoing development of government initiatives. The Disability Inclusion Lens will support the efforts of government and the disability community in achieving the full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of society.

### The Path Forward

- Society recognizes and acts upon its responsibility to work with the disability community to further the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in community affairs and activities.

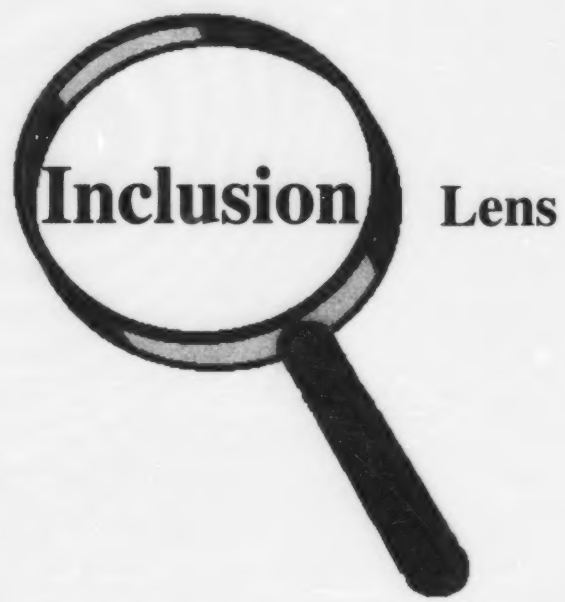
- Individuals with disabilities and their families understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities.

- Individuals and their communities advocate for disability issues.

### First Steps

- The Disability Inclusion Lens, currently being developed by the Office of Disability Issues and a joint community and government working group, be implemented by the spring of 2002.

- The Disability Inclusion Lens be used consistently throughout government.



## B - Safety and Security

### What we heard

*Violence and abuse ends when people who have a disability are not institutionalized and marginalized.*

— Community Forum 2000

### Issues

Participants at the community forums did not directly address safety and security issues. These issues were, however, indirectly addressed through comments about negative attitudes, discrimination, and concerns with respect to personal care. Council members have raised concerns with respect to safety and security, particularly regarding issues of abuse and neglect.

Individuals with disabilities are vulnerable to various forms of abuse including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, and neglect. Abuse can take place in domestic or institutional settings, public places or community environments.

Sometimes, individuals with disabilities need assisted or substitute decision-making supports. The new *Adult Guardianship and Co-decision-making Act* provides for new assisted or substitute decision making options for individuals with disabilities and additional safeguards for persons who are subject to guardianship applications.

However, a gap still remains for those individuals who require assisted or substitute decision-making support for personal care but for whom there is no family member or friend able to take on the role of guardian or co-decision maker. For example, elderly parents may be concerned about the care for their adult son or daughter with an intellectual or psychiatric disability after the parents' deaths. In our province, the Public Trustee can only act as a guardian or substitute decision-maker for an adult's financial affairs, not as a guardian or substitute decision-maker for an adult's personal care.

A joint community and government working group, established by Saskatchewan Justice, has been developing proposed amendments to *The Public Trustee Act* respecting public guardianship as well as amendments aimed at combating financial abuse. These proposed

amendments represent a significant step in addressing gaps regarding financial abuse of persons with disabilities and decision making support where no one is able to act as a guardian.

## The Path Forward

- Individuals with disabilities are safe and secure in their communities and are free from abuse and neglect.

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have access to a range of decision-making supports that respond to individual needs.

## First Steps

- Government of Saskatchewan pass proposed amendments to *The Public Trustee Act* that would create a Public Guardian and Trustee.

- Government of Saskatchewan pass and implement proposed amendments to *The Public Trustee Act* that would provide measures to address financial abuse.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote awareness around violence and abuse of individuals with disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote awareness regarding assisted and substitute decision-making.

- Government of Saskatchewan provide resources for emergency support services for individuals with disabilities wanting to leave abusive situations, including emergency respite, attendant care services and accessible shelters.

- Government of Saskatchewan provide resources to develop and maintain personal support networks and supported decision making networks for individuals with disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan develop a process enabling low-income families with members with disabilities to access legal information regarding wills and estate planning.

# C - Disability Supports

## What We Heard

*You cannot be part of the world if you can't get out of bed, get a bus, leave your house, have an interpreter, or have someone remind you of what needs to be done.*

— Community Forum 2000

*Individuals with disabilities are enjoying longer life expectancies reflective of the trend in the general population. At the same time there seems to be a trend toward de-institutionalization. These factors require greater support for community-based initiatives that will assist individuals with disabilities and their families.*

— Community Forum 2000

*Why is it so difficult to get needed equipment?*

— Community Forum 2000

*There needs to be consideration given to the extra cost of disabilities. Things ... cost so much more for those who are parents of children [with] disabilities*

— Community Forum 2000

*Home Care is far more than the provision of certain types of medical care at home. It is a way to encourage independent living and to prevent hospitalization and long term institutionalization. It is a way to promote the quality of life not only of persons with disabilities and their families but for all Canadians – most of whom will require certain forms of supports and services at some point in their lives.*

— Sherri Torjman, *Home Care: More Than Care at Home*

## Issues

Disability supports are goods, services, and information that assist individuals with disabilities to overcome the barriers that impede full participation in society. From one perspective, the Disability Action Plan is really about providing disability supports to ensure full citizenship for individuals with disabilities. As one council

member has stated "A disability support is just what you need to live your life."

The provision of disability supports has implications for all areas discussed in this action plan. These supports cover a broad range of services and aids. They include, but are not limited to, attendant services, interpreter services, respite care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, counselling, psychotherapy, technical aids and devices (such as wheelchairs, talking computers and Braille readers), and other supports such as prescription drugs, and advocacy. Housing and transportation services are also disability supports.

Individuals with disabilities consider the provision of supports and services as critical to achieving full and equal participation in the community and the labour market. At the community forums and around the council table, we heard numerous examples of the barriers that individuals and their families experience: gaps in supports of all kinds, rigid delivery systems, poor co-ordination and integration of services and supports, limited coverage for the extra costs of disability.

Diagnosis plays an important role in identifying the needs of the individual. However, in some instances, diagnostic criteria are used to establish eligibility for program support and services. Inequities occur when eligibility for services and supports is based solely on diagnostic criteria rather than a full assessment of individuals needs. This results in some individuals with disabilities not getting the support they need because they lack appropriate diagnosis for the program or service.

Many of these supports such as home care and the Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living Program (SAIL) are delivered through the health system and are traditionally viewed as meeting medical needs. However, these supports are more than health services. They are supports for daily living that enable individuals with disabilities to participate in their communities.

The fundamental importance of disability supports in the lives of individuals with disabilities speaks to the necessity of having individuals with disabilities and or their families assume full partnership in the decision-making processes regarding these supports. But repeatedly we heard that individuals with disabilities

and their families have little or no voice in decisions regarding the provision of services. When full partnership is denied, we compromise our vision of a society in which the rights of all individuals to self-determination are respected and which provides the resources and supports necessary for full citizenship for all.

Families caring for children and adults with disabilities identified the need for improved respite and day care services. While some services exist they are limited, have restrictive eligibility criteria, lack trained personnel, and are poorly integrated and co-ordinated. In order for this support to be effective it must be family-centred and managed, flexible, comprehensive, and based on family need.

Individuals with disabilities have limited housing options. Consideration needs to be given to providing a range of accessible and affordable housing options that will allow the individual to remain in the community. For some individuals this may mean the provision of supportive housing services. For example, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing has developed Saskatchewan Assisted Living Services (SALS) as part of senior housing initiatives. This program has some innovative elements, (e.g. partnering with health districts to provide supports) that could also benefit individuals with disabilities.

Inadequate transportation in urban and rural areas was a common theme at all of the community forums. Without accessible, affordable and flexible transportation services, individuals with disabilities cannot participate in their communities.

## The Path Forward

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have access to disability supports that meet their needs.

- Disability supports are person-centred not system centred. Supports are linked to the individual rather than to the program and remain with the individual as long as they are needed.

- The extra costs of disability (direct and indirect) are recognized and addressed.

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have an active role in the development of policy and procedures and delivery of needed disability supports.

## First Steps

- Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living Program (SAIL) be modified to be more flexible and responsive to individual needs and include an effective and transparent appeal process.

- Home care services (i.e. personal supports, home making and professional health care services) be provided for individuals with disabilities to enable them to live independently in their community.

- Home care services include options for self and/or family-managed care and individualized funding.

- Quality respite care that is accessible, flexible and affordable be provided to families caring for children and adults with disabilities and for seniors in need of care.

- Access to respite programs be based on need.

- Day-care services be enhanced to support families providing for and supporting individuals with disabilities. Day supervision programs be provided for older children, youth and seniors.

- Existing home modification programs be consolidated so that programs are co-ordinated and more easily accessible to individuals with disabilities.

- The Government of Saskatchewan increase supportive living arrangements and affordable housing options that facilitate living in the community.

- The Government of Saskatchewan develop an action plan on paratransit services in partnership with local governments that would address the following issues:

  - operational funding;
  - vehicle replacement; and,
  - provincial best practises or guidelines for paratransit services, including training for drivers, passenger safety, and for improved services for persons with invisible disabilities and seniors. These best practises to be developed in consultation with users of the paratransit services.

- The mandate and operations of Social Services Community Living Division be reviewed in light of the Disability Action Plan.

# D - Health

## What We Heard

*The entire health care system is not set up to deal with people who have disabilities in the same manner as other patients. If you have a disability, you are told to come back on "rehab" days or that you have to be dealt with differently. It is the way of thinking of people that needs to change, not the people themselves. It is possible to accommodate people within the existing environments and systems, the system just has to be flexible and open to change.*

— Community Forum 2000

*. . . given that a lot of northern communities are isolated, people in these communities do not always have regular or convenient access to the support services... We are therefore concerned about how people in these communities will receive these supports*

— Community Forum 2000

*. . . enhancement and co-ordination of the rehabilitation services throughout the life span for individuals with disabilities are essential. With longer life expectancies, one can expect that the individual with disabilities will require changing therapeutic and educational services in their lifetime. It is essential to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to ongoing and follow-up rehab services.*

— Community Forum 2000

*Mental health issues such as FAS/FAE, drug overdose, acquired brain injury have very limited support in the north. The north needs to address all supports for mental health disabilities. Currently, in the north there is very minimal ability to support any individuals with mental health issues.*

— Community Forum 2000

## Issues

We share the Saskatchewan Provincial Health Council's view that health is not simply the absence of disease but is "a dynamic process involving the harmony of physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well being. Health enables individuals, families and communities to function to the best of their ability within their environment."[5]

From our perspective, this definition of health suggests the need to understand health care and health services within an inclusive concept of citizenship. A citizenship perspective on health care focuses on inclusion and on changing the environment to meet the needs of the individual. In this model the individual is viewed as self-determining and as having the right to create and make decisions, take risks, and participate in the community. A shift in thinking is required to move the health system from a biomedical model of disability (with its focus on restorative health issues) to a model of disability that recognizes the long-term integration needs of individuals with disabilities.

This perspective has important implications for health services and supports. Current services and supports tend to focus on deficits associated with disability and remedial/restorative practices. This focus is important as a first step as it helps to define individual needs. However, the health system also provides significant support for daily living that individuals with disabilities will access throughout their life. Individual differences and changing needs over the life span need to be recognized.

Health care from a citizenship perspective moves beyond meeting narrow medical needs to providing supports for daily living that help individuals with disabilities participate in their communities and ensure that they reach their maximum level of functioning. Implicit in this approach is the need for the health care system to adopt new ways of delivering supports to individuals with disabilities and to develop ways of involving individuals with disabilities and family/caregivers as fully informed partners in the decision making process.

Rehabilitation and therapy services such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy are required disability supports for many individuals with disabilities. The need for these services is constant throughout the life span. Current resources are unable to meet the demands for these services. There are two main problems. First, there is insufficient programming to meet the needs of children with autism, learning disabilities or Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Second, adults with chronic disabilities do not have access to therapeutic services to enable them to maintain functional skills gained during their developmental years. Expansion of services for young children and the development of an adult treatment service system are critical to maintaining and improving the health of individuals with disabilities and will contribute to their ability to participate in their community.

Early diagnosis of disability and the accompanying provision of supports in the home and in the community can reduce the impact of the disability over the long term. Existing diagnostic facilities for young children are overextended. Adequate services for those living in rural areas and the north are lacking.

An important aspect of diagnosis is follow up at home with parents/caregivers. While some services and supports are available for parents/caregivers of young children with disabilities, there are fewer supports for parents/caregivers of older children. Given the council's understanding of health, the services must address emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well being. For healthy families this means we must be sensitive to the needs of each member of the family as well as the individual with disabilities.

Individuals with intellectual disabilities and psychiatric disorders face a different set of problems to those faced by persons with physical disabilities. Their disabilities are invisible and often misunderstood by the public. Some individuals with psychiatric disabilities may not be able to give informed consent for treatment. Thus needed treatment may not be provided. Individuals with dual diagnosis, (intellectual disability and a mental health disability) in many cases fall through the cracks in the service system.

Individuals with disabilities encounter a variety of physical barriers when accessing institutional and community based medical services. Facilities and equipment are often inaccessible. For example, many medical offices are not accessible at street level, lack automatic doors, or hallways wide enough to accommodate power wheelchairs. Examination tables are rarely adjustable for height or width. More work is required by the health districts to identify barriers and recommend necessary system changes to either neutralize barriers or provide appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

The Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues affirms its support for a publicly administered health system that is universal, portable, accessible, and comprehensive. We also recognize that the cost of accessing health care services and supports can increase the economic disadvantage of people with disabilities. Participant fees and co-payments can be barriers for individuals with disabilities when they try to access health services.

### The Path Forward

- Health services adopt person-centred planning and self/family management delivery options.

- Disability supports are linked to the individual not the program. Services reflect and adapt to changing needs of individuals with disabilities and their families throughout the life span.

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have access to information to make informed decisions regarding care.

- Barriers to accessing treatment are reduced (for persons unable to give informed consent) so that individuals with disabilities have a 'right to treatment.'

## First Steps

The section on disability supports contains steps that could have been included in the section on health. They are included in the disability supports section to emphasize the need for a transition from a medical model to social model of disability.

- Increase the capacity of community-based Early Childhood Intervention Programs to ensure timely support and programming.

- Increase the availability of diagnostic services for infants and children with disabilities, particularly in the north and rural centres.

- Government of Saskatchewan increase accessibility to and the level of rehabilitation and therapy services for children with disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan develop and implement a rehabilitation and therapy services model that recognizes that individuals with disabilities require ongoing lifelong rehabilitation and therapy services for optimum health.

- Government of Saskatchewan provide resources to assist health districts to make their facilities and services more accessible to individuals with disabilities and their families.

- Government of Saskatchewan increase resources for mental health services for the treatment, rehabilitation and long-term support of mental health disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote and facilitate the integration of health services with other community services (education, social services, community-based organizations, etc.) for persons with disabilities to develop a more seamless service delivery system.

# E - Education

## What We Heard

*[Children with disabilities] should have the option of attending the neighbourhood school*

— Community Forum 2000

*Integration is wonderful but we also need our peer group*

— Community Forum 2000

*At risk students in the school systems need to be identified early and then a plan of intervention set in place and reviewed and revised for several years. For many children, early interventions will provide them with the skills needed to avoid more costly supports later in their life and will address issues before the child loses self-esteem and hope.*

— Community Forum 2000

*The goal for all individuals in our society is full citizenship. Of central importance to this desired outcome is the provision of effective supports to children during their school years that prepare them for full citizenship now and in the future.*

*— Directions for Diversity: Final Report of the Saskatchewan Special Education Review Committee*

*A fundamental belief in Saskatchewan is that all individuals should have equal access to, and benefit from, educational programming and services.*

*— Strengthening Supports: Minister' Response to the Report of the Special Education Review Committee*

## Issues

Education, as the council envisions it, refers to barrier-free lifelong learning opportunities that maximize the potential of individuals with disabilities from birth to adulthood. Educational opportunities are not confined to school and to job training but also include opportunities to participate in learning activities to enhance the quality of life. As one council member put it "Education is more than just a step to employment. It also relates to quality of life."

A critical element to accessing education is the availability of disability supports. These supports must be provided in order for students with disabilities to participate equally in pre-school, elementary and high school, and post-secondary education and training programs. Supports for education include technical aides such as Braillewriters, sound field systems for individuals with hearing impairment and computers. Human resource supports include: tutors, teachers' associates, resource teachers, educational psychologists, social workers, interpreters, counsellors, speech and language pathologists, personal care assistants.

Ensuring that students with disabilities have access to necessary supports will require collaboration by the health, social services, education and justice systems. The Special Education Review Committee has recognized the need to work with other government departments and has suggested that Saskatchewan Education and Health develop a model for providing health support services to children in schools.

Parents/caregivers and/or individuals with disabilities need to be fully informed on all issues and need to be treated as equal partners in educational programming decisions. The Special Education Review Committee made a recommendation with respect to involving parents and guardians as partners on school-based collaborative teams. This is a start, but the policy must ensure that the parents and/or individuals with disabilities have access to all reports and information acquired by school based personnel.

The only appeal process for parents or students in the K-12 system is through educational institutions. The Saskatchewan Children's Advocate recently noted that there "are no formal mechanisms that provide for an impartial review, nor are there mechanisms to protect parents, students or teachers against retribution."[6] As well, the appeal process is not readily accessible for many individuals. Those who need support as they advocate for their child find it difficult to access this assistance. The Special Education Review did include a recommendation with respect to appeals. They recommended that "boards of education inform parents about policies and procedures within the school division, including the process for review of decisions."[7] This is a good first step but does not go far enough. An appeal process that is independent of the educational institutions is needed.

The student loan system is a significant barrier to individuals with disabilities accessing post-secondary educational institutions. While most post-secondary students need assistance with the repayment of huge student loan debt, students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. In many cases, they are unable to get summer employment to offset educational costs. They also face higher levels of unemployment after completion of their educational program. Repayment schemes need to be flexible enough to reflect individual circumstances, needs, and income levels.

## The Path Forward

- All individuals have equal access to and benefit from educational programming and services throughout their life span. Programs may be mainstream or specialized and disability supports are provided based on individual need. Parents, caregivers and individuals have more choice in the type of supports and services they access.

- Educational opportunities focus on the improvement of the quality of life of individuals with disabilities and not only on employability and entry to the labour market.

- Student financial assistance programs recognize and respond to the additional costs of disability and the challenges that individuals with disabilities experience in the repayment of student loans.

- Parents/caregivers and/or individuals with disabilities are full partners in determining educational programs whether mainstream programs, special programs, or a combination of programs. This includes having full access to information that will assist them in making informed decisions with respect to educational programs.

## First Steps

- Government of Saskatchewan promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in neighbourhood schools.

- Government of Saskatchewan ensure that all children with disabilities, beginning from birth, receive early childhood education and early intervention services to meet their needs, and that appropriate educational and intervention services continue through the life span.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote collaboration among government departments, health districts and school divisions to ensure that disability supports and health related services are available for children and youth with disabilities in all educational institutions.

- Government of Saskatchewan explore options to provide support for parents to advocate for children in the education system.

- Government of Saskatchewan implement a fair and independent appeal process for students or guardians to appeal school decisions or board policies.

- Government of Saskatchewan address barriers and disincentives that restrict individuals with disabilities from accessing post-secondary educational opportunities. Some of the issues to be addressed include:

  - access to support that covers the disability-related costs of attending post-secondary education institutions; and

  - a disability sensitive student loan policy that provides flexible student loan repayment options and expanded forgivenance options that are sensitive to individual circumstances, needs, and income levels.

# F - Employment

## What We Heard

*A representative workforce refers to individuals with disabilities being represented in all job positions; whereas, employment equity ensures designate positions for individuals with disabilities. Employment equity is not working effectively as designated positions create barriers too.*

— Community Forum 2000

*Perhaps the greatest difficulty faced by young, mentally disabled adults is to find and keep a job. Surely any action plan must address this need. Each individual requires specific needs; therefore a dedicated employment coach can incorporate knowledge gleaned from the caregivers of each individual and can play an important part in the successful career of people with disabilities.*

— Community Forum 2000

*[We] need to rebuild [the] volunteer component of society.*

— Community Forum 2000

*Failure to match an individual's abilities to the appropriate complexity of tasks may lead to premature termination of a job trial. This only serves to perpetuate attitudinal barriers with respect to prospective employers. It also diminishes the self-confidence of the individual with disabilities.*

— Community Forum 2000

*The environments of the Canadian workplace and our economic system have a greater impact on the extent to which people with disabilities become employed or find themselves out of the workforce than does the nature of any individual's particular disabilities.*

*— Equal Citizenship for Canadians with Disabilities: The Will to Act*

*A job is not the only indicator of success.*

*— One Voice: The Perspective of Aboriginal People with Disabilities*

*For Aboriginal people with disabilities, training must go beyond the acquisition of job skills. Training programs for our community must be governed by the four principles of the Medicine Wheel.*

*— One Voice: The Perspective of Aboriginal People with Disabilities*

## Issues

The council has adopted a broad definition of employment. Employment refers to a *continuum of involvement within the community including volunteerism, paid employment and supported employment*. To employ someone is to draw on that individual's abilities, strengths and interests thus enabling the individual to take their place as a contributing and valued member of society. This definition recognizes the importance of volunteerism in contributing to the economic and social well being of our community.

The council members are supportive of a representative work force where individuals with disabilities are represented in all job positions. The public and private sectors need to assess where future employment opportunities will occur and encourage training and recruitment of individuals with disabilities in these areas.

Current employment levels of individuals with disabilities within government are well below the employment equity target identified by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. Many of the participants at the forums noted that the Government of Saskatchewan should set an example to the private sector by being a leader in hiring individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities are an important untapped labour resource. Improving the employment opportunities of individuals with disabilities may require more extensive accommodations and support in the work place. These types of accommodations include human supports (e.g. job coaches, attendant services) or job modification or redesign around an individual's strengths and skills. Some supports may be required for two or three years or longer. Some individuals with disabilities may require some measure of support for most of their working lives. These types of accom-

modations provided through supported employment initiatives have allowed many individuals with disabilities to be employed in the competitive workforce rather than in sheltered employment.

The removal of attitudinal barriers will be one of the greatest challenges to hiring of individuals with disabilities. There are many misconceptions, myths, and assumptions regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities. This is most apparent if the disability is an intellectual or a mental health disability.

## The Path Forward

- Disability supports that facilitate attachment to the labour force are separated from income support.

- Employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities are increased through accommodation in the work place and through provision of supports based on need.

- Individuals with disabilities are recruited in all job categories in the provincial public service.

- Volunteer work is promoted and recognized as contributing to the economic, social and cultural fabric of our society.

- The positive and valuable contributions of individuals with disabilities to the work force are promoted and recognized.

## First Steps

- Government of Saskatchewan and Crown Corporations develop and implement an aggressive employment strategy for individuals with disabilities by 2002 that specifies goals and timetables for achieving a representative workforce. Elements of the strategy include the following:

  - Identification of future employment needs

  - Accommodations (e.g. job redesign, job coaches, mentorships)

- Expansion of summer student work opportunities and co-op education opportunities in high school and university to enable individuals with disabilities to gain work experience

- Peer support for individuals with disabilities employed in the public service

- Work site physical accessibility

- Participation in disability awareness initiatives

❖ Government of Saskatchewan support continued expansion and enhancement of supported employment initiatives.

❖ Government of Saskatchewan, in partnership with community agencies, develop supports/programs to assist individuals with disabilities to volunteer in their communities.

❖ Government of Saskatchewan, in partnership with the private sector and the disability community, develop a labour market strategy for individuals with disabilities. Some of the elements of such a strategy might include:

- Support and funding for private sector employers with innovative employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities

- Strengthen support for community-based employment services for individuals with disabilities

- Support and encourage self-employment and entrepreneurial activities in rural, urban and northern areas for individuals with disabilities

- Expansion of summer student work opportunities, co-op education and internship opportunities in high school and university to enable individuals with disabilities to gain work experience.

# G - Income Support

## What We Heard

*Increased earning power can provide more spending power and with this freedom to make choices. This increase will also help to lessen their dependency on others.*

— Community Forum 2000

*Each disabled persons needs are different, so you must have flexible rules. . . . social assistance workers have had no one touch their life personally with a disability so it is hard for them to understand where the disabled person is coming from and they intimidate them.*

— Community Forum 2000

## Issues

Income support refers to financial support for persons with disabilities and can include social assistance and taxation measures to offset the extra costs of disability. Many people with disabilities in Saskatchewan are either unemployed or not in the competitive labour market and rely on social assistance for income. In Saskatchewan in 1991: 58% of working age adults with disabilities were employed compared to 78% of persons without disabilities; 10.6% of working age persons with disabilities in the labour force were unemployed compared to 6.8% for working age persons without disabilities; 34.9% of working age adults with disabilities were not participating in the labour force compared to 15.4% of persons without disabilities.[8] Many persons with disabilities live in poverty and are excluded from participation in society. Lack of financial resources restricts inclusion.

The most effective strategy to overcome the conditions of poverty is facilitating the movement of people with disabilities into the labour market. Redesigning the income support system so that it facilitates entry into the labour market and supports inclusion and not marginalization is a key step toward achieving full citizenship.

During the community forums, many individuals with disabilities and families and support networks expressed discontentment with

the level of social assistance. The most common recommendation was to raise social assistance rates to overcome the poverty experienced by individuals with disabilities.

Participants at the community forums also told us that "one size doesn't fit all." Existing social assistance programs are not flexible enough to respond to the diverse and changing needs of individuals with disabilities. Program responses need to be individualized by involving individuals with disabilities in the determination of their own needs.

We heard clearly that the social assistance system has inherent barriers and disincentives to the participation of individuals with disabilities in the labour market. Individuals with disabilities are concerned that their attempts to take part in training, education and the competitive work force will lead to their loss of "disability" status and therefore needed supports. Concern about losing entitlement to income and supports is the most significant work disincentive for many individuals.

Individuals and their family members at the community forums also identified the issue of the extra costs of disability. These costs are often indirect or hidden and can include being required to pay a higher rent for suitable housing, or to spend higher amounts for meals and transportation.

One way to respond to the additional costs of disability is through the tax system. At the community forums, individuals with disabilities and family members suggested that tax initiatives both through the federal and provincial system would assist in offsetting the additional costs of disability.

The council members acknowledge the concerns of individuals with disabilities with respect to the income security system. However, an increase in social assistance rates is not the full solution. Rather, income issues should be addressed through a series of initiatives including, recognition for the extra costs of disability, separation of disability supports from income support, and support for estate planning.

## The Path Forward

- Individuals with disabilities are eligible for disability supports separate from social assistance.

- Social assistance encourages participation in the work force without penalty.

- Programs recognize and provide for additional costs incurred by individuals with disabilities and their families.

- Program and policy responses recognize and address the impact of disability and not the presence of disability.

## First Steps

- The Government of Saskatchewan develop an income and disability supports model that:

  - separates disability supports from social assistance
  - addresses the additional costs of disability
  - provides supports based on individual need
  - creates measures to facilitate the movement of individuals with disabilities into the labour market
  - separates training allowances and wages from income support
  - develops a quality of life/disability supplement outside of social assistance for individuals with disabilities who may not be able to participate in competitive employment.

- The Government of Saskatchewan find ways within the tax system to help offset the direct and indirect costs of disability incurred by individuals with disabilities and their families.

- The Government of Saskatchewan continue to work with the federal government to explore options within the tax system to address the extra costs of disability.

- The Government of Saskatchewan make amendments to The Saskatchewan Assistance Plan Regulations to allow money to be put into a trust either from an inheritance (established by a will) or in a living trust for a beneficiary with a disability so that the trust will not affect social assistance eligibility or benefits.

# IV. Future Role of the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues

The creation of the 15 member Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues provides a new level of involvement of individuals with disabilities, their families and support networks in establishing a direction on disability issues. For many, the consultation process and development of the Disability Action Plan was an opportunity to have a direct voice to decision-makers in government. It now becomes the responsibility of council members to ensure that this action plan continues to evolve and be responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities and their representatives. With this responsibility in mind, council members have identified the following future activities:

## Future Activities

The Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues will:

- participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of the Disability Inclusion Lens.
- promote and monitor the implementation the Disability Action Plan.
- participate in joint community/government working groups assigned the task of operationalizing the first steps of the action plan.
- present a report annually to the legislature on the status of individuals with disabilities. This report is to be presented in conjunction with the Office of Disability Issues.
- hold community forums every two years to help the council and government ensure that the Disability Action Plan continues to reflect the needs of the community and to gage progress in achieving the goal of full citizenship. These forums would be held in partnership with the disability community.

- propose and provide input on research relating to persons with disabilities.

- explore issues facing Aboriginal people with disabilities.

- review options and make recommendations to the Minister regarding a process through which individuals with disabilities may bring complaints and concerns to government.

# V. Conclusion

The Disability Action Plan is based on the principle of full citizenship for all individuals including those who have disabilities. This principle supports a vision of a society that recognizes the needs and aspirations of all citizens, respects the right of individuals to self-determination, and provides the resources and supports necessary for full citizenship. Awareness and understanding, safety and security, disability supports, health, education, employment, and income support are the elements needed to achieve this vision.

The Disability Action Plan represents a process through which our vision of

> *a society that recognizes the needs and aspirations of all citizens, respects the rights of individuals to self-determination, and provides the resources and supports necessary for full citizenship*

can be achieved.

The first steps in this action plan are the beginning of this process. They represent measures that council members believe are the most critical to removing barriers to full citizenship and are actions that can be attained in the near future. Some of the suggested actions such as the use of the disability inclusion lens and the development of true partnerships will require a change in attitude among individuals. Other suggested steps, for example supportive housing and adequate level of home care, will require increased funding levels. The path forward provides a vision of what our society would look and feel like if persons with disabilities were able to access supports and resources to ensure full citizenship.

Individuals with disabilities are an untapped resource in our society. Given appropriate supports and services, individuals with disabilities can contribute to the economic, cultural and social life of society thus enriching us all. This document is about finding the will to provide those resources.

# VI. Notes:

[1]The Council has referred to a number of documents and resources including, *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues and One Voice: The Perspective of Aboriginal People with Disabilities*. Please refer to the reference list at the end of the document for a list of additional documents.

[2]*Pathway to Integration - Final Report, Mainstream 1992*, May 1993, p.v

[3]In *Eldridge vs British Columbia* each of three appellants was born deaf and their preferred means of communication was sign language. They contended that the absence of interpreters impaired their ability to communicate with their doctors and consequently increased their risk of misdiagnosis and ineffective treatment. The appellants argued that the decision not to provide sign language interpreters for the deaf as part of the publicly funded scheme of medical care was infringement of their constitutional rights under of s. 15(1) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Supreme Court ruled that the failure to provide these services was a denial of their *Charter* rights and directed the government of British Columbia to administer their legislation consistent with the *Charter*.

[4]John Packer, "Self-determination and international law." Contribution to the PaVo-seminar *Self –determination and the United Nations - Options for West Papua*, Utrecht November 20, 1999, http://home.planet.nl/~pavo/Self-determination.htm.

[5]Saskatchewan Provincial Health Council, *Population Health Goals for Saskatchewan: A Framework for Improved Health for All*, 1994

[6]Darren Bernhardt, "System needed to review school complaints, advocate says," *The Star Phoenix*, 10 February 2001, sec. A, p. 8

[7]Saskatchewan Special Education Review Committee. *Directions for Diversity: Enhancing Supports to Children and Youth with Diverse Needs*. January 2000, p. 81

[8]Statistics Canada, *1991 Health and Activity Limitation Survey* (HALS).

# Appendix A

## Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues
## 1999 - 2001

**Wally Coates** — Mr. Coates is a retired teacher and former city councillor. Wally is an advocate for social justice with Senior Power in Regina and an active member of the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism.

**Ruth Dafoe** — Ms. Dafoe is a retired provincial civil servant and social worker who has worked in the areas of mental health services, medical and vocational rehabilitation, long term care and seniors' issues. Ruth has a long history of involvement with community organizations and in recent years has been active with the Saskatchewan Schizophrenia Society.

**Dawn Desautel** — Ms. Desautel is the parent of an adult son with physical and intellectual disabilities. She is the past President of the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres and has a long history of involvement as a volunteer board member with the Cypress Hills Ability Centre in Shaunavon.

**Sherry Ehman** (Vice Chair) — Ms. Ehman works as the Director of Independent Living Programs at the South Saskatchewan Independent Living Centre. She is a long time advocate on disability issues. Sherry has a disability herself and is an active member of the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

**Ron Filleul** — Mr. Filleul has a long history of community involvement and is the past chair and current board member of the Saskatchewan Division Board of the CNIB. Ron is also a member of the City of Regina Advisory Committee on Access and a member of the board of the South Saskatchewan Independent Living Center.

**Lynette Griffin** — Ms. Griffin is an individual with a disability and is employed by the City of Regina as a Social Policy and Research Analyst -Access Consultant. She has worked with the DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) and as a front line worker with adults and children with disabilities.

**Shane Haddad** — Mr. Haddad is president of People First of Saskatchewan, a provincial association of self-advocates, as well as an executive board member of People First Canada. Shane and his wife understand the challenges of living, working, and parenting faced by people with intellectual disabilities.

**Michael Huck** (Chair) — Mr. Huck has retired from both the provincial and federal governments. He is a longtime advocate and spokesperson for provincial and national disability organizations. He also served on the City of Regina's Advisory Committee on Access Employment Subcommittee.

**Cindy Karstens** — Ms. Karstens is employed as the Family Resource Room Coordinator at the Kinsmen Children's Centre in Saskatoon. She is an active member of the Saskatchewan Cerebral Palsy Association. Personal experience as an adult with a disability and a wide range of work and volunteer experience give Cindy a grounding in disability issues.

**Archie King** — Mr. King, a member of the Lucky Man First Nation, is Manager of the National Aboriginal Clearing/Connecting House on Disability Issues. He is the advocate for the Saskatchewan First Nations Network on Disabilities and is a member of the national Aboriginal Reference Group on Disability Issues.

**Jonina Male** — Ms. Male is the parent of an adult son with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. She is a Resource Teacher with the Saskatoon Public School Board and President of the Saskatchewan Fetal Alcohol Support Network. She has been involved with the Learning Disabilities Association at the local, provincial and national levels and is a past president of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada.

**Michael Pasloski** — Mr. Pasloski is an active member of the Yorkton Brain Injury Support Group and an articulate spokesman for improving supports for persons with acquired brain injury.

**Greg Plosz** — Mr. Plosz is the parent of an adult son with an intellectual disability. Greg is an advocate and member of the Regina and District Association for Community Living and a past President of the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL) and a director of the Canadian Association for Community Living. He also has professional experience as a teacher working with students with special needs.

**Melissa Rezansoff** — Ms. Rezansoff is originally from the Kahkewistahaw First Nation. Melissa is the Regional Manager of the Neil Squire Foundation in Regina. She has been quite active in the Aboriginal disability community and was recently one of the community researchers involved in the *Urban Aboriginal Persons with Disabilities: Triple Jeopardy!* research project. She has faced many personal challenges and has continued to demonstrate commitment and leadership in a wide range of disability organizations.

**Patrick Roszell** — Mr. Roszell is a hearing impaired father of a child who is blind. He is employed by the Regina Health District. Patrick is actively involved in disability issues and has served on the City of Regina Advisory Committee on Access since 1996.

# Appendix B

## Summary of Path Forward and First Steps

The Disability Action Plan is based on the principle of full citizenship for all individuals including those who have disabilities. Our vision is of a society that recognizes the needs and aspirations of all citizens, respects the right of individuals to self-determination, and provides the resources and supports necessary for full citizenship. Seven areas, awareness and understanding, safety and security, disability supports, health, education, employment, and income support are the elements needed to achieve this vision.

The following outlines the path forward and first steps for each of seven areas. The path forward identifies directions necessary for our vision to become a reality. The first steps identify some suggested actions to move toward the vision of full citizenship for individuals with disabilities. The first steps in this action plan are the beginning of this process. They represent measures that council members believe are the most critical to removing barriers to full citizenship and action actions that can be attainable in the near future.

### Awareness and Understanding

#### The Path Forward

- Society recognizes and acts upon its responsibility to work with the disability community to further the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in community affairs and activities.
- Individuals with disabilities and their families understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities.
- Individuals and their communities advocate for disability issues.

#### First Steps

- The Disability Inclusion Lens, currently being developed by the Office of Disability Issues and a joint community and government working group, be implemented by the spring of 2002.
- The Disability Inclusion Lens be used consistently throughout government.

## Safety and Security

### The Path Forward

- Individuals with disabilities are safe and secure in their communities and are free from abuse and neglect.

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have access to a range of decision-making supports that respond to individual needs.

### First Steps

- Government of Saskatchewan pass proposed amendments to *The Public Trustee Act* that would create a Public Guardian and Trustee.

- Government of Saskatchewan pass and implement proposed amendments to *The Public Trustee Act* that would provide measures to address financial abuse.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote awareness around violence and abuse of individuals with disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote awareness regarding assisted and substitute decision-making.

- Government of Saskatchewan provide resources for emergency support services for individuals with disabilities wanting to leave abusive situations, including emergency respite, attendant care services and accessible shelters.

- Government of Saskatchewan provide resources to develop and maintain personal support networks and supported decision making networks for individuals with disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan develop a process enabling low-income families with members with disabilities to access legal information regarding wills and estate planning.

## Disability Supports

### The Path Forward

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have access to disability supports that meet their needs.

- Disability supports are person centred not system centred. Supports are linked to the individual rather than to the program and remain with the individual as long as they are needed.

- The extra costs of disability (direct and indirect) are recognized and addressed.

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have an active role in the development of policy and procedures and delivery of needed disability supports.

### First Steps

- Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living Program (SAIL) be modified to be more flexible and responsive to individual needs and include an effective and transparent appeal process.

- Home care services (i.e. personal supports, home making and professional health care services) be provided for individuals with disabilities to enable them to live independently in their community.

- Home care services include options for self and/or family-managed care and individualized funding.

- Quality respite care that is accessible, flexible and affordable be provided to families caring for children and adults with disabilities and for seniors in need of care.

- Access to respite programs be based on need.

- Day-care services be enhanced to support families providing for and supporting individuals with disabilities. Day supervision programs be provided for older children, youth and seniors.

- Existing home modification programs be consolidated so that programs are co-ordinated and more easily accessible to individuals with disabilities.

- The Government of Saskatchewan increase supportive living arrangements and affordable housing options that facilitate living in the community.

- The Government of Saskatchewan develop an action plan on paratransit services in partnership with local governments that would address the following issues:

  - operational funding;
  - vehicle replacement; and,
  - provincial best practises or guidelines for paratransit services, including training for drivers, passenger safety, and for improved services for persons with 'invisible disabilities' and seniors. These best practises to be developed in consultation with users of the paratransit services.

- The mandate and operations of Social Services Community Living Division be reviewed in light of the Disability Action Plan.

## Health

### The Path Forward

- Health services adopt person-centred planning and self/family management delivery options.

- Disability supports are linked to the individual not the program. Services reflect and adapt to changing needs of individuals with disabilities and their families throughout the life span.

- Individuals with disabilities and their families have access to information to make informed decisions regarding care.

- Barriers to accessing treatment are reduced (for persons unable to give informed consent) so that individuals with disabilities have a 'right to treatment.'

## First Steps

The section on disability supports contains steps that could have been included in the section on health. They are included in the disability supports section to emphasize the need for a transition from a medical model to social model of disability.

- Increase the capacity of community-based Early Childhood Intervention Programs to ensure timely support and programming.

- Increase the availability of diagnostic services for infants and children with disabilities, particularly in the north and rural centres.

- Government of Saskatchewan increase accessibility to and the level of rehabilitation and therapy services for children with disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan develop and implement a rehabilitation and therapy services model that recognizes that individuals with disabilities require ongoing lifelong rehabilitation and therapy services for optimum health.

- Government of Saskatchewan provide resources to assist health districts to make their facilities and services more accessible to individuals with disabilities and their families.

- Government of Saskatchewan increase resources for mental health services for the treatment, rehabilitation and long-term support of mental health disabilities.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote and facilitate the integration of health services with other community services (education, social services, community-based organizations, etc.) for persons with disabilities to develop a more seamless service delivery system.

## Education

### The Path Forward

- All individuals have equal access to and benefit from educational programming and services throughout their life span. Programs may be mainstream or specialized and disability supports are provided based on individual need. Parents, caregivers and individuals have more choice in the type of supports and services they access.

- Educational opportunities focus on the improvement of the quality of life of individuals with disabilities and not only on employability and entry to the labour market.

- Student financial assistance programs recognize and respond to the additional costs of disability and the challenges that individuals with disabilities experience in the repayment of student loans.

- Parents/caregivers and/or individuals with disabilities are full partners in determining educational programs whether mainstream programs, special programs, or a combination of programs. This includes having full access to information that will assist them in making informed decisions with respect to educational programs.

### First Steps

- Government of Saskatchewan promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in neighbourhood schools.

- Government of Saskatchewan ensure that all children with disabilities, beginning from birth, receive early childhood education and early intervention services to meet their needs, and that appropriate educational and intervention services continue through the life span.

- Government of Saskatchewan promote collaboration among government departments, health districts and school divisions to ensure that disability supports and health related services are available for children and youth with disabilities in all educational institutions.

- Government of Saskatchewan explore options to provide support for parents to advocate for children in the education system.

- Government of Saskatchewan implement a fair and independent appeal process for students or guardians to appeal school decisions or board policies.

- Government of Saskatchewan address barriers and disincentives that restrict individuals with disabilities from accessing post-secondary educational opportunities. Some of the issues to be addressed include:

  - access to support that covers the disability-related costs of attending post-secondary education institutions; and

  - a disability sensitive student loan policy that provides flexible student loan repayment options and expanded forgivenance options that are sensitive to individual circumstances and needs, and income levels.

## Employment

### The Path Forward

- Disability supports that facilitate attachment to the labour force are separated from income support.

- Employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities are increased through accommodation in the work place and through provision of supports based on need.

- Individuals with disabilities are recruited in all job categories in the provincial public service.

- Volunteer work is promoted and recognized as contributing to the economic, social and cultural fabric of our society.

- The positive and valuable contributions of individuals with disabilities to the work force are promoted and recognized.

**First Steps**

- Government of Saskatchewan and Crown Corporations develop and implement an aggressive employment strategy for individuals with disabilities by 2002 that specifies goals and timetables for achieving a representative workforce. Elements of the strategy include the following:

  - Identification of future employment needs
  - Accommodations (e.g. job redesign, job coaches, mentorships)
  - Expansion of summer student work opportunities and co-op education opportunities in high school and university to enable individuals with disabilities to gain work experience
  - Peer support for individuals with disabilities employed in the public service
  - Work site physical accessibility
  - Participation in disability awareness initiatives.

- Government of Saskatchewan support continued expansion and enhancement of supported employment initiatives.

- Government of Saskatchewan, in partnership with community agencies, develop supports/programs to assist individuals with disabilities to volunteer in their communities.

- Government of Saskatchewan, in partnership with the private sector and the disability community, develop a labour market strategy for individuals with disabilities. Some of the elements of such a strategy might include:

  - Support and funding for private sector employers with innovative employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities
  - Strengthen support for community-based employment services for individuals with disabilities

- Support and encourage self-employment and entrepreneurial activities in rural, urban and northern areas for individuals with disabilities

- Expansion of summer student work opportunities, co-op education and internship opportunities in high school and university to enable individuals with disabilities to gain work experience.

## Income

### The Path Forward

- Individuals with disabilities are eligible for disability supports separate from social assistance.

- Social assistance encourages participation in the work force without penalty.

- Programs recognize and provide for additional costs incurred by individuals with disabilities and their families.

- Program and policy responses recognize and address the impact of disability and not the presence of disability.

### First Steps

- The Government of Saskatchewan develop an income and disability supports model that:

  - separates disability supports from income

  - addresses the additional costs of disability

  - provides supports based on individual need

  - creates measures to facilitate the movement of individuals with disabilities into the labour market

- separates training allowances and wages from income support
- develops a quality of life/disability supplement outside of social assistance for individuals with disabilities who may not be able to participate in competitive employment.

❖ The Government of Saskatchewan find ways within the tax system to help offset the direct and indirect costs of disability incurred by individuals with disabilities and their families.

❖ The Government of Saskatchewan continue to work with the federal government to explore options within the tax system to address the extra costs of disability.

❖ The Government of Saskatchewan make amendments to *The Saskatchewan Assistance Plan Regulations* to allow money to be put into a trust either from an inheritance (established by a will) or in a living trust for a beneficiary with a disability so that the trust will not affect social assistance eligibility or benefits.

# Appendix C

## References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